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In early nineteenth-century American literature, the European anti-hero transfuses the developing figure of the Westerner, the sojourner who escapes from the Eastern settlements to the lawless inland border. This mythic character, if not an outlaw, is at least beyond the law, a bachelor Adam alone in the vast garden of the West. In R. W. B. Lewis's phrase he is "emancipated from history,"[1] freed from the old realms of crown, church, and class. Because he owes nothing to the past, he appears self-created, a figure of unlimited possibility in a universe that lies open to his will and imagination.

His literary origins reach back to the Old World "picaro," or rogue hero, appearing in continental novels by the early seventeenth century and in British literature a century later in works by Defoe and Fielding. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the English picaro had merged with the German gothic "generous outlaw or sublime criminal,"[2] a type that Byron brought to perfection in English literature. The Byronic persona marks "the beginning of popular acceptance of the [modern] myth of the romantic or heroic criminal."[3] The outlaw hero sees through society's moral pretensions to discover pervasive decadence and deceit, so he indignantly strikes back by breaking the law. Thus, while technically he *may* be a criminal, he is also a frustrated idealist who sees glimpses of a better world.[4]

The literary growth of the anti-hero paralleled the rise of a real-life figure, the pirate or smuggler. Throughout European and colonial history, smuggling has been spurred either by the prohibition of goods in demand, or by the imposition of steep tariffs or excise taxes. While illicit commerce has existed in Europe since the late Middle Ages (with the creation of the first customs system), it was the phenomenal popularity of tobacco that gave rise to modern smuggling.[5] In fact, the founding of Virginia was a direct result of the English craving for tobacco. One long-standing feature of smuggling is that it has been a crime in which the "criminal" often has enjoyed widespread approval. In U. S. history, for example, the origins of the independence movement are closely related to smuggling and opposition to royal duties and taxes. "The Boston Tea Party [of 1773], the first act of rebellion that led to American independence, was the culmination of sixty years of outright dissatisfaction with Britain's commercial policy,

in which Americans had smuggled on principle."[6] Cheating the royal government was seen as political expression, and notable colonial smugglers included Peter Faneuil and Benedict Arnold.

Not only in political but also in economic terms has smuggling often been excused. Adam Smith, the founding theorist of capitalist economics, insisted upon the natural justice of smuggling. A staunch opponent of government efforts to regulate commerce, Smith, in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), describes the smuggler as a person who

> though no doubt highly blameable for violating the laws of his country, is frequently incapable of violating those of natural justice, and would have been, in every respect, an excellent citizen, had not the laws of his country made that a crime which nature never meant to be so. [In] corrupted governments . . . the laws . . . are little respected. . . . By this indulgence of the public, the smuggler is often encouraged to continue a trade which he is thus taught to consider as in some measure innocent.[7]

Adam Smith thus displaces culpability from the smuggler and blames government interference in commerce. His sympathetic treatment is repeated in favorable portraits of smugglers and bandits in the works of such belletristic authors as Rene Chateaubriand, Robert Burns, Friedrich von Schiller, Sir Walter Scott, and Charles Lamb, to name a few.

In our own century, the era known as Prohibition, which was mandated into law in early 1920 by the 18th Amendment, ushered in smuggling on the largest scale in history. Bootleggers reaped huge profits by importing alcohol from Canada, the Bahamas, Cuba, and Mexico. Ships in the Rum Navy ferried liquor to the U. S. three-mile limit, where speedboats raced it past the Coast Guard. Heavy trucks crossed the Canadian border nightly into Vermont and New Hampshire and rumbled toward New York. As in previous ages, because he provided a commodity in demand, the bootlegger was a widely accepted figure often regarded as a public benefactor. Collusion in rumrunning was rampant among bootleggers, law enforcement authorities, and ordinary citizens. Prosecutions were rare, and convictions were seldom won because of strong popular support for bootleggers.[8] Many bootleggers came to be regarded as heroes, much in the way that buccaneers and pirates in previous ages--one thinks of such glamorous figures as Henry Morgan and Jean Lafitte-- had been lionized.

In *The Great Gatsby*, whose main action is laid in 1922, F. Scott Fitzgerald repeatedly hints that Jay Gatsby has quickly built his gaudy

fortune by bootlegging, making Gatsby quite possibly the first modern version of the smuggler to appear in American fiction. Furthermore, Fitzgerald's wavering attitude toward Gatsby--he is presented as both a racketeer and an urban pioneer--mirrors the public's long-standing ambivalence toward smugglers as both criminals and bandit-heroes.

In the novel's timetable Gatsby arrives penniless in New York City during the summer of 1919, still wearing his U. S. Army uniform because he cannot afford civilian clothes.[9] In a pool hall he meets Meyer Wolfsheim, a crimelord who buys him clothes and tailors him to be a con man. Gatsby, a legitimate war hero (150), joins the American Legion to provide cover for a developing career that apparently includes bootlegging and gambling, including quite possibly fixing the 1919 World Series (74). By the time Nick Carraway meets Gatsby in June of 1922, Gatsby has acquired vast wealth and a mansion on Long Island, as well as considerable notoriety.

Fitzgerald's Meyer Wolfsheim is modelled on the notorious Arnold Rothstein, known to millions of Americans as the "man who fixed the 1919 World Series." Born in New York City in 1882, Rothstein won big as a pool hustler, card shark, and bookmaker. As he accumulated money, he diversified into larceny, bootlegging, drug running, and diamond smuggling--and, of course, into bribery of public officials to protect his interests. With greater profits came "legitimate" investments in securities, insurance, trucking, pharmacies, real estate, even art collecting. Wealth brought increasing scrutiny from prosecutors, but during his long racketeering career Rothstein was never tried for a crime. In 1928, three years after the publication of *The Great Gatsby*, Rothstein at age 46 was shot fatally through the groin in a Central Park hotel. No one was convicted of his murder.

Fitzgerald was familiar with many of the details of Rothstein's criminal career and adapts them to his portrayal of Meyer Wolfsheim. But I suggest that Fitzgerald also uses well-known anecdotes from Rothstein's reign as a crimelord to characterize Jay Gatsby's brief spree.[10] For instance, during World War I Rothstein purchased a country estate near Hewlett, Long Island, to locate a gambling casino outside the jurisdiction of New York City authorities. Rothstein's

> house was located on spacious grounds. These were beautifully landscaped and included garden paths and a rippling brook.
>
> Rothstein staffed the house with expert help. Thomas Farley [a bartender from his gambling house on West Forty-sixth Street]

> acted as butler and overseer. The stickmen and dealers were required to wear evening dress. . . .
>
> Entry to the gambling house was by invitation only. However, anyone who was known able to afford to lose a few thousand was able to get an invitation.[11]

Rothstein even cultivated the friendship of showgirls from the theater to lure suckers to his casino. One of these was the actress Peggy Hopkins Joyce, known for her trademark orchid georgette gowns. Rothstein worked the crowds, often joining in the card and dice games, but he was noted among fellow gamblers as well as his customers for never taking a drink. He operated openly by buying off the Long Island police and politicians.

Many of these details seem to inspire Fitzgerald's depiction of Gatsby's "palace on Long Sound Sound" (49) and his flashy parties and guests. Like Rothstein's ornate casino, Gatsby's *faux* French chateau is seen not as a residence but as "an elaborate road-house" (64), an "amusement park" (41), a "'menagerie'" (109), a "caravansary" (114), and "'the World's Fair'" (82). Like Rothstein, Gatsby is set apart from his guests because he does not drink (50). Among his wealthy and famous guests is a stylish actress, described as "a gorgeous, scarcely human orchid of a woman" (106), a description which reads almost like Peggy Joyce's press clippings. Also, Gatsby's house is staffed by Wolfsheim's gangsters, who masquerade as domestic workers and chauffeurs (114, 162).

In addition to gambling, Arnold Rothstein's criminal syndicate was involved in big-time bootlegging and other smuggling activities, and Fitzgerald seems also to have used these details to portray Gatsby. Rothstein owned a string of drugstores as fronts for bootlegging. So does Gatsby. Looking back over his brief three-year civilian career, Gatsby tells Nick that he amassed a fortune "'in the drug business'" (91). Daisy tells Tom how Gatsby owned "'a lot of drug-stores. He built them up himself'" (110). But Tom Buchanan throws this claim in Gatsby's face and brands him a criminal:

> "I found out what your 'drug-stores' were. . . . [Gatsby] and this Wolfsheim bought up a lot of side-street drug-stores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter. . . . I picked him for a bootlegger the first time I saw him. . . ." (134)

Gatsby concedes the truth of Tom's revelations when he replies defensively, "'What about it?'"

Rothstein was one of Prohibition's first rumrunners.[12] Like Gatsby with his hydroplanes, Rothstein had a fleet of custom-built speedboats operating during 1920-1921 out of Long Island. With the compliance of corrupt Coast Guard officials, Rothstein's launches took on cases of whiskey from European ships anchored offshore. Once landed, this cargo was loaded onto Rothstein's trucks and conveyed under police motorcycle escort to his warehouses near New York City. In the novel Gatsby seems to have a cozy relationship with the Long Island police. When a motorcycle cop pulls him over for speeding, Gatsby flashes his wallet and mentions his close relationship with the commissioner. "'Right you are,'" the suddenly deferential policeman responds, "'Know you next time, Mr. Gatsby. Excuse *me* !'" (68).

To brighten the shady aspects of Gatsby's character, Fitzgerald endows him with ruddy good looks and an appealing personality, and dresses him in dandified pink suits, silver shirts, and gold ties. Indeed, he may have been thinking specifically of one of Rothstein's infamous associates in rumrunning, a sharper named Dapper Dan Collins, "a confidence man and the 'great lover' of the underworld."[13] In the early twenties Rothstein bankrolled Collins in a number of liquor and dope deals. Like Gatsby, Collins had changed his name (probably from Robert Arthur Tourbillon); also like Gatsby, Collins served as "a magnificent 'front' [man]. He was tall, handsome and had a head of blond hair that women envied and could not attain with a peroxide bottle." Here is Rothstein's biographer's account of one of Dapper Dan's escapades:

> In 1921 . . . he appealed to Rothstein for funds to finance a rumrunning deal. . . . Collins told Rothstein that he had a boat at his disposal which was faster than any possessed by the Coast Guard. He had a friend in the Bahamas who had arranged the purchase of 1,200 cases of Scotch whiskey. . . . What he lacked--and what he wanted Rothstein to provide--was the $90,000 to pay for the Scotch.

Collin's rum boat was anchored in Philadelphia, where he was known as Charles A. Cromwell. There Collins had fabricated a story--similar to the howlers Gatsby tells Nick--that he was "a member of the wealthy and social family of that name. 'Related to the Stotesburys. . . .'"[14] The liquor was eventually unloaded at a private dock in New Jersey and trucked to New York City. Between them, Rothstein and Collins divided $300,000, a colossal sum in 1921.

There seems little doubt that Fitzgerald drew freely from such Jazz Age lore to depict Jay Gatsby as a bootlegger.[15] In so doing, Fitzgerald was able to make Gatsby an outlaw without having him seem truly vicious. Because of his underworld "'gonnegtions'" (71), Gatsby can startle Nick Carraway with the menace in his gaze, so much so that Nick can say Gatsby looked "as if he had 'killed a man'" (135). Yet the ambiguously "criminal" nature of Gatsby's rumrunning, which enjoyed the support of a large part of the twenties public, allows Fitzgerald to present him as an effervescent charmer whose smile can light a room and whose "extraordinary gift for hope" (2) can captivate even a defeatist like Nick.

This contradiction--which of course is Fitzgerald's--reflects the long-standing ambivalence in American writing toward the lawbreaker as hero. In nineteenth-century American writing, Natty Bumppo, Hester Prynne, and Huck Finn all break the law, yet they also celebrate the raw vigor of the New World. This contrast between their hardy forest virtues and the social corruption of the settlements repeats itself through much popular fiction and also forms the basis for the historian Frederick Jackson Turner's famous "frontier thesis." Writing in the 1890s, Turner depicted the lawless territories as a "safety valve" which offered escape from legalized civic oppression. He saw the frontier as innately democratic and classless. But he feared that social mobility and personal freedom might not survive the end of the frontier. Note that in Turner's time the last frontier was not California, but the upper Midwest which had been skipped over during the western migration: northern Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas, Montana, and Idaho. It was to these territories that the final pioneers turned.

In the story of Dan Cody[16] in *The Great Gatsby,* Fitzgerald creates a fictional amalgam of Daniel Boone and William "Buffalo Bill" Cody who seems to Nick the last of these frontiersmen. Dan Cody, who becomes Gatsby's benefactor and role model, is "a product of the Nevada silver fields, of the Yukon, of every rush for metal since [1875]" (100). He becomes a multi-millionaire by cornering the Montana copper market. Nick studies Cody's portrait--reverently enshrined in Gatsby's bedroom--and sees "a gray, florid man with a hard, empty face--the pioneer debauchee, who during one phase of American life brought back to the Eastern seaboard the savage violence of the frontier brothel and saloon" (101). In this scene, Nick dwells on the brutality of nineteenth-century Western life, of which Cody was a product.

Soon after, reflecting on Gatsby's short, violent life, Nick suggests "the indirect influence of Hopalong Cassidy and the direct influence of Dan Cody"[17] as frontier heroes who inspired Gatsby. Similarly, Henry C. Gatz, a poor North Dakota farmer, cites another inspiration, James J. Hill, the "ruthless founder of the Great Northern Railroad and a prominent member of St. Paul society at the turn of the century."[18] At his son's funeral, Mr. Gatz speculates that if Jimmy had "'lived, he'd of been a great man. A man like James J. Hill. He'd of helped build up the country.'" (169). Hill, like Cody, is an adventurer whose identity is inseparable from the frontier.

Unhappy with his prospects as a prairie farmboy, at age 17 Jimmy invented Jay Gatsby, a wily fortune hunter in "the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty" (99). But unlike the frontier kingpins of the previous generation, such as Hill or Cody, Gatsby's quest leads him not westward but the opposite way, to post-World War I New York City. When Gatsby and Nick become acquainted on Long Island in the summer of 1922, Nick is put off by Gatsby's dressy ostentation and slick falsity. But Nick's disapproval melts when he discovers beneath the posturing a Midwesterner like himself. After all, Nick draws his own identity from a Midwestern "clan" which was established, he proudly tells us, by his great-uncle in 1851. This elder Carraway, who "sent a substitute to the Civil War" (2-3) while he profiteered in the hardware trade, made his fortune in frontier circumstances little different from those of Hill or Cody. Early in the novel, when Nick notes his facial resemblance to this pioneer ancestor, the pride he takes in his great-uncle's "rather hard-boiled painting" (3) seems little different from Gatsby's reverence for Dan Cody's gruff portrait.

Nick's eventual alliance with Gatsby arises from Nick's need to fantasize himself in just such a frontier role, even now in the third decade of the twentieth century. When he comes to New York three years after Gatsby, Nick reveals his longing to be thought of as "a guide, a pathfinder, an original settler" (4), in other words, a pioneer. Nick expresses this wish when he exalts Gatsby as "a Platonic conception of himself" (99), that is emancipated from history, a "young man without a past" (149), an American Adam who creates his own mythology. Much like the restless Jimmy Gatz, Nick yearns to be freed from the drab piety of Midwestern towns, "with their interminable inquisitions which spared only the children and the very old" (177). Just as Turner had predicted, by the turn of the century the last frontier of the upper Midwest had been absorbed by the oppressive settlements. So for Nick, Gatsby, and those of their generation, the place to seek a

modern fortune is not under western skies but in the reverse direction, on the mean streets of America's toughest city.[19]

Yet unlike Gatsby, Nick proves too timid to be an Eastern pioneer in New York during the Roaring Twenties. He fizzles as a stockbroker on Wall Street, and after less than six months he limps west to the "wide lawns and friendly trees" (3) of his youth. Much like Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown, Nick "confronts the wilderness just once, and very briefly, before returning home to the obligations he must fulfill but cannot entirely accept."[20] Just as Brown retreats to Salem Village, Nick flees the psychological forests of New York and regressively tries "to recover the Midwest of his childhood memories."[21]

Nick's withdrawal from New York completes the novel's symbolic reversal of West and East, of frontier and settlement. Nick tells us he "decided to come back home" (178) after his tumultuous New York experience because he wanted "the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever" (2), an absurd and infantile demand. Lacking insight into the story he tells, Nick thus repeats Gatsby's error of trying to repeat the past. He lapses into nostalgia for his Carraway ancestors, whose accomplishments seem to dwarf his own.[22] He finds action impossible, choosing instead to live vicariously through the idealized exploits of the "great" Jay Gatsby, "the hero he wished to be and never will be."[23] Nick's renunciation of New York and retrenchment in the place of his birth suggest at basis a rejection of maturity and a fear of growing up. For Nick, writing in 1924 from what he sourly describes as "the bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond the Ohio" (177), the frontier has indeed closed.

In his exhausted reverie which ends the novel, Nick has given up hope of being "a guide, a pathfinder, an original settler," that is, of being emancipated from history. Instead he sees himself as a prisoner of history, "borne back ceaselessly into the past" (182). Lacking any belief in the future, he succumbs to historical despair, implying that we are all caught in a closed circle of delusion.[24] Beyond this sense of personal defeat, in cosmic terms Nick foresees the end of American nature. The book's final paragraphs reveal his pessimistic readiness "to accept the inevitable destruction of nature by man."[25] In this darkening vision, the regenerative wilderness "year by year recedes before us" (182), taking with it any possibility of self-transcendence. Three decades earlier, Turner had predicted that the passing of the wilderness might extinguish the human spirit. Nick's desolation as he

concludes that the "vanished trees" have given way uselessly to "the dark fields of the republic" seems to bear Turner out.

Although Nick's narration ends with a lament for a lost "green breast of the new world," the point of Fitzgerald's reversal of East and West in *The Great Gatsby* is to show that the wilderness quest, as a literary and mythic paradigm, survived the physical closing of the American frontier. Escape from historical consciousness through self-regeneration remained a defining goal of male American narratives long after the woods were cleared. The first step in his process occurred when urban novelists appropriated the mythology of the backwoodsman and transferred it to the tough rising cities. The frontier hero lost his buckskin and evolved into a variety of urban forms. Among the first and most durable figures of this big city-type was the bootlegger, the twenties variant of the romantic smuggler. In *The Great Gatsby* Jimmy Gatz, a descendant of the last American pioneers who settled the Black Hills, is a son of the north country. But by the twentieth century, the Dakota badlands have turned to wheat fields, so he leaves the farm to conquer a new wilderness, the Jazz Age underworld. There matters of survival are no less extreme than in the deep woods of the nineteenth-century border romance. In New York he reinvents himself as a smuggler-hero on Rum Row. Gatsby's exploits bear comparison to those of his robber baron idol, Dan Cody, as he amasses a fortune in bootlegging, gambling, and other criminal interests. But by the end of the novel, Gatsby has been consumed by his dangerous urban frontier quest. Nick Carraway, his Midwestern secret sharer who has followed him to the East, stays behind to bury him. Then, lacking Gatsby's confidence in the future, Nick withdraws from the big city jungle to reclaim the grim safety of the Midwestern settlements.

Notes

[1] *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1955), p. 5.

[2] Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (1933; rpt. London, 1960), p. 77.

[3] Teresa Godwin Phelps, "The Criminal as Hero in American Fiction," *Wisconsin Law Review*, 6 (1983), 1433.

[4] Phelps, p. 1436.

[5] The rise of the smuggler in English commercial and social life is chronicled in Neville William's *Contraband Cargoes: Seven Centuries of Smuggling* (1959; rpt. [Hamden, Conn.] , 1961).

[6] Williams, p. 145.

[7] Vol. 10 of *The Harvard Classics* (New York, 1937), 538-539.

[8] See Williams, Chapter VII, and Robert Carse, *Rum Row* (New York, 1959).

[9] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York, 1925), p. 172. All subsequent references are to this edition.

[10] Andre Le Vot concludes that "the criminal annals of the twenties were amply used" by Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* and that Gatsby's criminal career is drawn from numerous "cases of corruption in the period (131), including bootlegging, bribery, and stock fraud." See *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Biography*, trans. William Byron (New York, 1984), pp, 127-132. Le Vot's work originally appeared in French in 1979.

[11] Leo Katcher, *The Big Bankroll: The Life and Times of Arnold Rothstein* (New York, 1958), pp. 109-110.

[12] Katcher, pp. 232-234.

[13] Katcher, p. 241.

[14] Katcher, p. 242. Of course, Nick claims to be a descendant of "the Dukes of Buccleuch" (2), which is scarcely less absurd.

[15] Matthew J. Bruccoli suggests that Gatsby is based on Max Gerlach, a neighbor of the Fitzgeralds in Great Neck, Long Island, during the summer of 1923. However, almost nothing is know of Gerlach. See *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York, 1981), pp. 183-184. Bruccoli's suggestion does not rule out that Gatsby may be a composite of many Roaring Twenties bootleggers. Joseph Corso seems close to the truth when he concludes that "Fitzgerald absorbed the life flowing around him, particularly on the North Shore of Long Island in 1923, to help formulate characterizations and settings in his fiction" (10). See "One Not-Forgotten Summer Night: Sources for Fictional Symbols of American Character in *The Great Gatsby*, *Fitzgerald/Hemingway Annual, 1976*, pp. 8-33.

[16] Joseph Corso argues that Dan Cody is a composite of at least three people: "Buffalo Bill" Cody, who kept a home in Duluth, Minnesota; Dan Cody, a socialite from Birmingham, Alabama, who was a romantic rival for Zelda Sayre; and Edward Gilman, a wealthy benefactor of Robert Keer, Jr., who was a close friend of Fitzgerald's on Long Island. Corso concludes that a 1923 reference in

Fitzgerald's *Ledger* to a "Dapper Dan" is to the Birmingham Dan Cody (20). But it could also suggest Fitzgerald's awareness of the legendary bootlegger, "Dapper Dan" Collins (see above), who was in cahoots with Arnold Rothstein.

17 Susan Resneck Parr, "Individual Responsibility in *The Great Gatsby*, " *VQR*, 57 (1981), 672.

18 Tim Sherer, "Midwestern Influences in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*," *Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature Newsletter* 11 (1981), 14.

19 Their "discovery" had been anticipated as early as the 1830s by Edgar Allan Poe, America's first author of urban fiction. In stories like "The Man of the Crowd" Poe had shown the way to locate the true psychological wilderness not in the woods not but in the city.

20 Edward Jayne, "Pray Tarry with Me Young Goodman Brown," *L&P*, 29 (1979), 111.

21 Parr, 676.

22 The psycho-historian Richard H. King uses the term "monumentalism" to describe a debilitating longing for the past. Monumentalists are pessimistic about their shrunken futures because they see a "gradual decline in energy and will as generation gave way to generation" (92). See *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955* (New York, 1980), particularly chapter four.

23 Le Vot, p. 143.

24 For a harsh but perceptive critique of Nick's world view, see Stephen Zelnick, "The Incest Theme in *The Great Gatsby* : The False Poetry of Petty Bourgeois Consciousness," in *Weapons of Criticism: Marxism in America and the Literary Tradition*, ed. Norman Rudich (Palo Alto, Cal., 1976), pp. 327-340.

25 Carole Moses, "'Nature is Never Spent': The Persistence of the Natural in *The Great Gatsby*," *Pennsylvania English* 11 (1985), 27. She makes useful distinctions among the novel's nature images, whether suggesting garden, wilderness, or cosmos.